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SIPDIS

SECSTATE EUR/PGI FOR POMAINVILLE, EUR/NB FOR GERMANO, AND
S/GAC
COPENHAGEN FOR DANDO
CDC FOR TIMOTHY HOLTZ

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [TSPL](#) [KPAO](#) [LH](#)
SUBJECT: Minister of Health Looks to U.S. for Continued
Cooperation in Combating HIV/AIDS and TB

REF(s):

- [1A](#). VILNIUS 90
- [1B](#). VILNIUS 58
- [1C](#). VILNIUS 57
- [1D](#). 2004 VILNIUS 1548
- [1E](#). 2004 VILNIUS 1546

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - NOT FOR INTERNET

Summary

1.(SBU) Ambassador Mull met with the new Minister of Health Protection, Zilvinas Padaiga, on January 26th as part of his tour of Lithuania's new cabinet (reftels). The Minister demonstrated command of his new duties and clear vision for needed health reforms. He will undoubtedly be a valued asset in efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and other health challenges in the region, including corruption in the pharmaceutical sector. He was knowledgeable and graciously supportive of USG efforts to assist Lithuania in fighting emerging diseases and pledged support for encouraging health science cooperation. End Summary.

Health Reform a Continuing Challenge

2.(U) Minister Padaiga quickly confirmed the Ambassador's suggestion that health reform is a tough job, requiring new ideas for reducing Lithuania's exceptionally high trauma and accident rates, as well as minimizing the flight of doctors to Western and Northern Europe. Despite only being on the job for one month, the Minister will present his action plan to the Government on February 1st, focusing on the need to restructure the healthcare system to reduce the number of hospitals and improve efficiency. When questioned, the Minister identified cardiovascular health, mental health, alcoholism, and trauma from accidents as the major health problems afflicting Lithuanians. He pointed out that trauma rates in Lithuania are the highest in Europe, including injuries from motor vehicle accidents often involving alcohol.

3.(SBU) While acknowledging medical treatment as an area of needed improvement, the Minister specifically noted that public health and preventative measures are key to reduce the major causes of illness and injury. Lithuania only spends 3% of its health budget on preventative measures and public education, risk reduction, and other programs. Padaiga noted more than once that U.S. technical assistance and professional collaboration has been of essential importance in reforming healthcare.

Impressive Attention to Corruption and HIV/AIDS

4.(SBU) The Ambassador expressed appreciation for the strong emphasis the Minister places on corruption and the success Lithuania has had in maintaining a low HIV prevalence rate. The Minister met with the Special Investigations Service within days of taking office to discuss options for creating a department within the Ministry to investigate corruption related to pharmaceuticals and other issues.

5.(U) The Minister thanked the Embassy for its ongoing cooperation with the Lithuanian AIDS Center (under the Ministry) in training Lithuanian specialists. The Minister is an old colleague of the AIDS Center Director and noted that he has been kept apprised of the situation as it has evolved over the past several years in Lithuania and the region. He noted that HIV/AIDS cases are starting to turn up in rural areas, increasing the need for community-based educational programs. The Ambassador also briefed the Minister on the extensive tuberculosis training and prevention program run by the CDC and suggested a face-to-

face meeting in the future. (Note: A FY04 SEED Act grant to the Lithuanian AIDS Center targets the training of doctors and public health specialists in Lithuanian's outlying cities and towns. The CDC also runs a vital program to train Lithuanians to detect, prevent, and treat TB in drug-resistant forms. End note.)

Minister Pledges Health Science Cooperation,
Assistance with Science and Technology Agreement

6.(SBU) The Minister discussed the great contributions to health science from the U.S. and the plentiful contacts Lithuanian doctors and researchers have with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Noting Padaiga's involvement in health science, the Ambassador discussed the efforts underway to conclude a Science and Technology (S&T) Agreement with Lithuania. Padaiga assured the Ambassador that he would take up the S&T Agreement with the Minister of Finance and help include a Value-added Tax refund provision in the agreement (ref A).

Comment: An Active Player

7.(SBU) Given his charisma and confidence, the Minister will undoubtedly play an influential role in the new cabinet. Labor party leader Viktor Uspaskich clearly picked a capable person for the job. If Minister Padaiga's energy is any indicator, he will be able to have a beneficial impact on the high rates of disease and trauma afflicting many Lithuanians. As the Embassy's technical assistance programs in HIV/AIDS and TB will run through CY05, the Minister's genuine gratitude and support should aid program success. His interest in health science and U.S.-Lithuania cooperation should help end the S&T Agreement stalemate.

MULL